

non-flowering edible

158



**REINDEER LICHEN** (*Cladonia rangiferina*)

FLOWERS: No flowers

DESCRIPTION: Airy carpet of antler-looking tips. Soft and pliable when wet, but wiry and brittle when dry.

HABITAT: Open ground, shaded woods

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: Year-round

USES: Soup, flour, jelly

159

---

CAUTION: Most lichens are purgative; they contain an acid that breaks down rocks. While I find no indicator from any edible- or poisonous-plant book that a caution is necessary, consider yourself warned, at least.

---

CONSIDERATION: Reindeer lichen can be picked easily. There is, therefore, the possibility and danger of eradicating an entire area, upsetting the balance to which it contributes. AVOID OVER-COLLECTING!!!

Reindeer lichen has been one of the more intriguing sources of food I've tried. The soft, thick, spongy carpet in wet weather becomes wiry and brittle in dry weather.

It is easy to gather a large supply in a short time, which in itself is a rarity when gathering wild edibles! Another plus for this food is the knowledge that it may be gathered the year around.

The lichen lifts off the ground easily, leaving a dirty bottom which should be cut off. Place the lichen in an attic near the ceiling or on the kitchen counter to dry. When dried, package the lichen in a container or plastic bag and roll it or crunch it into small pieces. I freely substitute it for half the flour required in biscuits and muffins. There is a noticeable green "thing" in your hot bread, but the taste is very good. Reindeer Lichen Biscuits are worth your time and trouble. Cut 4 T shortening into  $1\frac{3}{4}$  cup flour,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup dried, crushed reindeer lichen, 3 t baking powder,  $\frac{1}{2}$  t salt. Add  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup milk and mix. Roll or pat out and cut for round biscuits or into 3-inch finger strips. Bake at 450 degrees for 12-15 minutes. Another hot bread worth your kitchen time is Reindeer Lichen Muffins. Put  $1\frac{3}{4}$  cup flour,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup reindeer lichen,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup brown sugar, 4 t baking soda and  $\frac{1}{2}$  t salt in a bowl. Stir in 2 eggs, 1 cup milk, and  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup liquid shortening. Bake in muffin tins at 400 degrees for 20-25 minutes.

Chocolate Chip Cookies do not seem to suffer from using the lichen flour. Just follow your favorite chocolate chip recipe and substitute  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of lichen for flour.

My attempts at making a jelly by soaking the lichen in water overnight, boiling with milk, and adding wine and honey were not worth recommending.

The lichen, when soft and gelatin-like from simmering in milk, may be thickened with corn starch, seasoned and served as a passable soup...for anyone *extremely* hungry!

At any rate, it is a different, conversational meal you'll serve when experimenting with this wilding.

This reminds me of shades of *My Side of the Mountain*!!